

VSEA- ESD Labor Team Proposal from survey results on ESD training needs

May 17, 2013

Summary:

Sixty-one ESD employees completed a survey aimed at gaining a better understanding of the training needs for ESD employees. The results were processed by members of the ESD Labor Team and VSEA Staff in order to develop a formal proposal to management on training needs and to provide management greater insight on the challenges facing ESD workers.

The Labor Team believes strongly—and is supported by the survey—that the Vermont Economic Services Division is facing serious challenges, including low employee morale, excessive work load, and complicated and redundant oversight and management. The ESD Labor Team wants to work with management to address these challenges. The ESD Labor Team believes that many of the challenges facing ESD can begin to be addressed through a comprehensive training program.

Key findings:

- ACCESS training is top priority and training done by someone who understands ACCESS.
- A Comprehensive training program for new employees is crucial.
- Refresher and follow- up courses are needed soon and can serve as a process to reintroduce training and establish training routine for districts.
- Process management has failed and it presents a significant roadblock to implementation of a new training program.
- Cross training of different programs is an emerging idea.
- A core, standard training should be offered every three months.
- Establish formal mentoring program with experienced staff in mentoring role.
- Desk Aids and physical, updated manuals need to continue to be available.
- Trainings need to be offered statewide and in person.

Proposal:

We respectfully ask that management use the results of this survey in the development and implementation of a **comprehensive training program**. We anticipate that this summary and proposal will serve as a positive step for greater engagement between Labor and Management on training, as well as other areas in need of development.

We are requesting that management **provide a written response** to this proposal and include if and how the results of this survey and this proposal will be used in the development of a training program. **We expect management to incorporate a majority of these proposals.** Should management make a determination that it is not feasible to incorporate the suggestions made by the team--based on survey feedback-- the labor team would like a detailed explanation as to why management is unable to implement the proposal in its entirety. It is the intention of the labor team to hold management accountable to these responses.

Note: Some respondents had multiple answers to questions and some respondents did not answer all the questions. This means percentages may not equal 100%.

TYPES ON TRAININGS

#1: Since the elimination of ESD's training unit (HRD) during the Douglas Administration, what components of its work would you like to see returned to the Division's training program?

Summary: Training is seriously lacking and very much wanted by ESD employees. Respondents provide an array of specific ideas to build upon general view that training is needed.

Proposal: Labor proposes the establishment of a new, comprehensive training unit that has more frequent trainings on ACCESS, refresher courses, cross training of different programs and extensive new employee training.

Breakdown of Responses:

Refresher trainings	18%
ACCESS training	16%
Set aside training unit	16%
Cross training (on all programs)	15%
Extensive new employee training	10%
More frequent and consistent	10%
Special training for issues that arise	7%
Program/ division specific training	7%
Statewide consistency	7%
Trainers more informed about work	7%
Interviewing	7%
Health care	5%
Computer skills	5%
Supervisory training	2%
Food stamps	2%
Online training models	2%

#2 What types of training should NEW ESD employees receive?

Summary: Beyond ACCESS and 3SQ VT, it is clear that new employees will benefit from a multitude of training topics and a new employee training program.

Proposal: Establish a new employee training with ACCESS, 3Sq VT, Health Care as core topics and create a series of theme based topics based on below findings.

Breakdown of Responses:

ACCESS	51%
3Sq VT	49%
Health Care	49%
Fuel	44%
Reach Up	44%
GA	39%
Reach First/ Reach Ahead / PSE/ Lifeline/ EP	38%
Interviewing	25%
Onbase	15%
Mentors should do some training with new staff	15%
Refresher Trainings	11%
Training should involve a computer lab	11%
Foundations Training / New Worker Training	8%
How to process taxes	7%
Customer Service	7%
How the programs work together	5%
ININ	5%
How to Process Self Employment cases	5%
Reach Up Case Managers need Access Training too	5%
Faster availability of training for new workers	3%
Forms	3%
Catns	3%
Workload Management	3%
DV	3%
Trauma	2%
Professional Development	2%
Social Worker Ethics	2%
Reach Up Sanctions	2%
Spenddowns	2%
New workers need one on one time with their Supervisor	2%
Trainers need current experience	2%

TIMING OF TRAININGS

#3. Currently the trainings are offered at various times throughout the year based on need. ESD employees have stated that trainings are too infrequent. How would you schedule the trainings to benefit employees?

Summary: People want routine and established times for trainings. "Based on need" simply does not work and is not feasible, given the excessive workloads of many ESD employees.

Proposal: A core, standard training offered every three months, with more topical trainings offered in between.

Breakdown of Responses:

Quarterly	30%
Monthly	16%
More localized	13%
New worker – as needed	8%
Several times per year – rotate through programs	4%
Bi-annual refresher	4%
More frequently	3%
Annual refresher	3%
Bi-monthly	3%
More trainings web based	2%
Extensive computer/process training	2%
Bi-monthly/new worker	2%
Refresher-on-going	2%
Quarterly-refresher	2%

#4. ESD employees have suggested an intensive 3 to 4 week training on all programs and the ACCESS database? Do you agree with this? Please explain.

Summary: No clear consensus, but a majority of responses agree on the need for ACCESS training and some continuing mentorship.

Proposal: An intensive, core training based on ACCESS should be offered to all current employees and mandatory for new employees. It should be implemented in concert with a formal mentoring program.

Breakdown of Responses:

Agree	46%
Do not agree	38%
No Answer	16%

Key comments

“No. I think intensive training of 1 week for 1 program at a time. Build on that with a few weeks between each program to practice and apply what was learned. ACCESS training should be included in every program training. All ESD staff need some basic ACCESS training so it would be good to have a specific basic ACCESS training when brand new to ESD.”

Benefit Programs Assistant Administrator, 25 years’ experience

“This is the best idea I have heard yet, ESD employees can not be expected to learn a program in 5 days and be expected to constantly refer back to their manuals when they have a client in their office.”

BPS New employee

“Only if there is enough mentoring and support provided after the training. That is a considerable amount of information to absorb, and I would be concerned, knowing how ESD is fond of throwing workers to the wolves, that supervisors would expect a new worker to be able to function working with all programs with little to no support, mentoring and supervision.”

BPS, 6 years’ experience

#5. ESD employees reported having a “mentor” for six months after receiving initial training. Would you like this to return as part of training new employees?

Summary: Overwhelming support for a mentor program for at least first six months.

Proposal: Establish formal mentoring program that has senior and experienced staff other than supervisors in mentoring role. A mentor must have reduced workload to be effective.

Breakdown of Responses:

Yes	92%
No	7%
No response	2%

Key comments

“Mentoring/buddy system is always best. I still use mine after all these years.”

BPS, 23 years’ experience

“Absolutely. When I was new I found it frustrating that my supervisor was not always available (she’s a busy lady!) I was going to other co-workers for questions, not realizing at the time that I was disturbing and distracting them from their work. The role of a mentor would be easier for a new worker since supervisors are so busy and not always available.”

BPS, 2 years’ experience

“Our supervisors are not always easily accessible within our departments when we have immediate questions. A “mentor” would be great for a go to person and a support.”

New Reach Up Case manager

“It only works when there are very experienced workers WHO HAVE TIME TO SPEND FREQUENTLY with new employees. The current process management model combined with the loss of staff and depth of experience makes this a nice idea but difficult to effectively implement.”

Reach up team leader, 8 years’ experience

#6 Can you identify the training materials that you received that you value and would like for new and or all employees to have?

Summary: The basics work best—physical, paper based manuals. Online tools are only supplemental.

Proposal: Desk Aids and physical, updated manuals need to continue to be available. As new training and programs emerge, it would be helpful to identify what works with Desk Aids and manuals and replicate.

Breakdown of Responses:

Desk Aids	21%
Updated Training Manuals	20%
Updated Health Care Training manuals	16%
Updated Procedures	7%
Access Shortcuts	5%
Online tools	5%
Searchable online tools	5%
Community Resources for the whole State	3%
Intensive FS manual	3%
Taxes handbook	3%
Standards sheet	3%
Updated training materials are needed for all was consistent across the board	2%
Self Employment handbook	2%
Federal Months	2%
Approved Holidays	2%
Ratable Reduction table	2%
HC codes	2%
Qtips	2%
Internet	2%
Fuel Dealer list	2%

#7 What training materials would you like to have as reference tools to utilize post-training?

Summary: Similar summary to question #6. Desk Aids work.

Proposal: Identify what works with Desk Aids and replicate.

Breakdown of Responses:

Desk Aids	43%
Updated Manuals for all programs	19%
Searchable Online tools	10%
Procedures	5%
Code sheets	5%
Vista / AmeriCorps Desk Aids	2%
Self Employment binder	2%
Something that allows us to search a rule and go right to the site	2%
Hard copies of rules and procedures	2%
Ability to email with trainer for continued support	2%
Qtips	2%
Contacts for DD's and other staff around ESD	2%
ACCESS training manual	2%

#8 For Seasoned employees, what types of trainings would you like to receive to better service your clients?

Summary: Any type of training will be helpful. General refresher courses are a productive way to get training back into ESD and help establish a training routine for districts.

Proposal: In concert with core training topics, establish frequent and statewide refresher courses for seasoned employees.

Breakdown of Responses:

Refresher Trainings in all areas	51%
Policy / Rules/ Procedures	8%
Bridges out of Poverty	3%
LTC Refresher	3%
ACCESS	3%
MH and Trauma	3%
Customer Service	2%
DV	2%
Ethics	2%
MSP	2%
Chap	2%
ESIA	2%
Outside Resources	2%
Byin	2%
Mentor / Senior Workers	2%
Understanding Cultural Difference	2%
FMED	2%
Taxes	2%
Interviewing Skills	2%
Substance Abuse	2%

WEBINARS

#9: Some ESD employees suggested webinars as a possible training tool for professional development of seasoned employees. Do you agree with this and what types of webinars would you like? Please be specific.

Summary: No consensus and minimal enthusiasm for having webinars. Most positive responses only favor webinars over have no trainings at all.

Proposal: Webinars should only be used for refresher courses and for certain topics with fewer participants. Management should not invest time and resources into Webinars at the expense of in-person training.

Breakdown of Responses:

no	34%
yes	26%
not sure	16%
no answer	23%

#10: If you do not agree with utilizing webinars, please provide more information about how you would like to have the opportunity to participate in professional development?

Summary: Majority supports discussion based, in-person, local training in the districts, based on real world challenges.

Proposal: Hire experienced trainers who will conduct quarterly trainings in each district and develop curriculum based on real world challenges. Trainers must have command of ESD work and policy.

Breakdown of Responses:

Face to face, local training	57%
Training based on real life scenarios	13%
More discussion based	10%
Prefer webinars	7%
More funding for personal trainings	3%
Not enough time to do training	3%
Training with other state agencies	3%
Training outside state system	3%

#11: Please add any information that you think would be useful to help shape the training for ESD employees.

Key comments:

“Training needs to be a priority and it never has been. Access training has never been done and many (including myself) just learn as you go and hope you are doing it right. If you are using a system that issues benefits and healthcare then we should know the system inside and out.”

BPS Specialist, 6 years' experience.

“Our staff are our investment and our customers. We have to seriously take a look at their health and wellness in an ever changing environment. We have tried many things that did not work. It is critical to admit what isn't working and adapt to try to fix it while at the same time recognizing what is working, for whom, and researching how to bring that working model to the rest of the State. We have to better trust in the instincts, experience, and voices of staff on the lines and appoint people to work groups at every level as equal stakeholders in the outcomes of new processes and procedures.”

Reach Up Team Leader, 21 years' experience.

“ESD needs to acknowledge that Reach Up is no longer a close partner with eligibility. The disconnect between the two halves of the service is more and more apparent, particularly at the management levels. We in reach up cannot assist eligibility in many ways because we have been systematically omitted from planning and implementation, yet it is still believed that we 'help run the office'. We run our own part, which eligibility does not understand, and can provide little assistance to eligibility yet we are included in emails to the district management, almost always on eligibility issues, as though we are expected to do something about these issues.”

Anonymous

“There are a lot of good "seasoned" staff that could be utilized. Use the resources that are available instead of hiring some big training outfit from the outside to train our staff. You might as well say we have no training unit because of the unavailability. One trainer for each program? Pre training courses that are available aren't being kept up to date so they can't be utilized. Staff have been saying for the past 20 years that the lack of training and mentors is the downfall for staff. Unfortunately, Supervisors no longer have any idea how staff are doing because of how their roles changed. That's why you need a mentor to work with the bps and supervisor. New staff feel overwhelmed, burned out quickly because they're pushed into caseloads with inadequate training with causes health issues.”

Anonymous